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Mrs Babs Day
Executive Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Day

Short inspection of Elmfield School for Deaf Children

Following my visit to the school on 14 November 2017 with Ofsted Inspector Hester Millsop, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in January 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Since your appointment as executive headteacher you have wasted no time in establishing a strong culture of learning. You are an inspirational leader who is passionate about the quality of care and education pupils receive. Your effective and dynamic leadership has galvanised the staff. You, your staff and governors share the aspiration and determination for Elmfield School to become a centre of excellence for deaf children. Together, you drive forward improvements to ensure that pupils get a good education in a safe and nurturing environment.

You have tackled the areas identified as needing improvement at the previous inspection successfully. For example, you have addressed the need to improve pupils' achievement in writing by securely embedding the new visual phonics programme across the school. Pupils are now able to successfully use their knowledge of phonics in their reading and writing and make good progress.

You, your leaders and governors have made a clear and accurate evaluation of the school's performance and are fully aware of the further improvements needed. For example, you know that the new systems which track pupils' progress need to be embedded across the school to check that pupils make the very best possible progress across year groups and subjects. In addition, you recognise that additional work needs to be undertaken to further raise pupils' attendance. Your unwavering

commitment to the pupils of this school means that you will continue to work with families and agencies to ensure that all pupils attend regularly.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Those who responded to the online survey or spoke with inspectors stated that their children are well looked after, are taught well, and make good progress and that the school is well led and managed. They speak highly of the support their child receives and the quality of teaching. Comments such as 'the nurturing, caring, all-embracing ethos of the school is rare and the teaching staff are just fantastic and wonderful', 'a warm and caring team who really put the child first', and 'we would choose this school again in a heartbeat', are just a few of the many accolades given by parents.

At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the key lines of enquiry to be considered during the day. These included: how the school ensures that pupils are safe; the impact of leaders in ensuring that pupils receive an effective education; how teaching promotes good learning, especially in communication and writing; how pupils are encouraged to be independent; and how effectively pupils are prepared for their future destinations. These key lines of enquiry are considered below under 'Safeguarding' and 'Inspection findings'.

Safeguarding is effective.

You, other leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality.

The nature of your school means that all pupils who attend are vulnerable. There is a shared understanding of the need to protect pupils against all possible risks. Staff are tenacious in building excellent relationships with pupils to gain their trust. The school works in close partnership with external agencies, which include social services, healthcare providers and the National Deaf Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, to ensure that they do everything they can to meet pupils' needs.

Staff and governors receive high-quality training and regular updates on keeping pupils safe, including aspects such as female genital mutilation and child sexual exploitation. Consequently, when necessary staff are quickly able to identify concerns and take prompt action with confidence.

Leaders, including governors, are aware of the importance of recruiting safely. All staff are carefully vetted prior to starting employment to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that adults will always sort out any concerns or worries they may have. Similarly, parents appreciate all that staff do and are in no doubt that their children are kept safe while at school. Indeed, a typical comment made by a parent described how 'I completely trust the staff, trust they care for her.'

Inspection findings

- 'Transformational' and 'empowering' is how your leadership was described to inspectors during the inspection. This is exemplified by the effective education and care pupils receive at Elmfield. You have developed a cohesive and highly effective team of senior and middle leaders. Therefore, the leadership capacity of the school remains strong.
- You, along with the staff team, unanimously share the school's aspiration to provide pupils with an outstanding education. You have high expectations of yourself and your staff. Consequently, pupils achieve well and make good progress.
- You and your senior leaders carefully and routinely monitor the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that it is consistently strong. Staff welcome and appreciate the effective support and guidance you provide through coaching and mentoring. You carefully plan professional development to ensure that it precisely matches the needs of both the school and the individual member of staff. You do not hesitate to tackle underperformance if staff do not meet your exacting standards. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning over time is consistently good.
- Staff know each pupil extremely well. For example, the information on pupils' profiles which indicate how pupils access their learning is used carefully. This ensures that teachers plan activities which precisely meet the individual needs of pupils.
- The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and learning experiences for pupils. There is a strong focus on the core skills of communication, reading and writing. Visual phonics is effectively taught. There is a consistent use of dual language by staff. Speech and British sign language immerses pupils in a language-rich environment. Consequently, pupils make good progress in their communication, reading and writing. For example, pupils read to inspectors with aplomb. They could discuss favoured authors and styles of books such as Roald Dahl and murder mysteries. Pupils have regular opportunities to hone their writing skills across a range of subjects. For example, younger pupils were writing about their friends. They were able to write in complete sentences which were accurate and with well-chosen vocabulary, spelled correctly. Other pupils were able to read a poem that they had written with confidence, demonstrating their increasing writing and reading skills.
- Pupils and staff are justifiably proud of pupils' achievements. Pupils talked with animation about their involvement in the forthcoming production of 'Romeo and Juliet', working alongside mainstream schools. Their confidence in using a range of communication tools is palpable.
- Pupils make good progress in their learning and development from often extremely low starting points. There is no discernible difference in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. This is because you use additional funding well to support these pupils in addition to the highly personalised curriculum which meets the needs of each individual pupil.

- You are creative in encouraging pupils to be independent. For example, the introduction of keeping chickens is highly successful. Pupils are eager to care for the animals' needs. They demonstrate their independence by feeding, cleaning and collecting the eggs. Such activities raise pupils' confidence and self-esteem, which is reflected in the good progress they make in their school work and social development.
- You carefully plan for pupils' future destinations. As a result, all pupils move on successfully to further education, training or employment.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the new assessment and tracking systems are securely embedded and monitored to check that pupils are making the best possible progress
- there is a continued focus on improving the attendance of pupils.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bristol. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Jen Southall
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors met with you and your senior leaders. Together, we talked about the improvements which have been made since the previous inspection. We viewed learning at both the primary and secondary sites. We also held discussions with governors, middle leaders and an education adviser from the local authority. Inspectors spoke informally to pupils and listened to them read.

We looked at a wide range of documentation, including the school's evaluation of its own performance and information relating to pupils' current achievement and progress. Inspectors also checked the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements.

We spoke to parents during the day, took into account the seven responses to the online survey, 'Parent View', and considered additional comments received from parents via the free-text message service. Inspectors also considered the 19 responses received from staff.